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Promotion and protection of the rights of children

Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

Summary

The present third annual report reviews key developments and initiatives undertaken at the global, regional and national levels. As the mandate completes its third year, the report provides an overview of results achieved and progress promoted in the area of the protection of children from violence, identifying efforts required to sustain and scale up achievements made, and informing a strategic future agenda.

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I. Mandate and strategic priorities

1. The mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children was established by the General Assembly in resolution 62/141, initiated in September 2009[1] and framed by the United Nations Study on Violence against Children (the "Study") (A/61/299) and its strategic recommendations.

2. The Special Representative is a high-profile, global independent advocate for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children, acting as a bridge builder and a catalyst for action across sectors and settings where violence against children may occur. She promotes the protection of children from violence as a human rights imperative, making use of mutually supportive strategies, including advocacy; the promotion of international, regional and national consultations to advance progress, identify good practices and promote cross-fertilization of experience; the hosting of expert consultations; the development of thematic studies and information materials; and the organization of field missions.

3. The overall thrust of the Special Representative's mandate is to accelerate progress in the implementation of the Study recommendations, with a particular emphasis on those with a time-bound target, namely:

(a) The development in each State of a national comprehensive strategy to prevent and respond to all forms of violence;

(b) The introduction of an explicit legal ban on all forms of violence against children, in all settings;

(c) The consolidation of a national data system and research agenda on violence against children.

In previous reports (A/66/227 and A/HRC/19/64), the Special Representative reported more fully on these priority recommendations, which are further addressed in chapter III of the Global Progress Survey on Violence against Children.

4. To strengthen her advocacy and communication outreach, the Special Representative established a website on children's protection from violence.[2] In addition to being a repository of information, the website provides a platform for networking among key partners, as well as social media tools and a Children's Corner with child-friendly materials.

II. Consolidating progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations Study on Violence against Children

5. The present report reviews key developments and initiatives promoted by the Special Representative during the past year at the global, regional and national levels. In addition, at the end of the three-year mandate established by the General Assembly in resolution 62/141, the report provides an overview of progress promoted and results achieved to ensure the protection of children from violence.

[1] The Special Representative assumed her position on 1 September 2009. A fuller explanation of her appointment and mandate can be found in document A/HRC/13/46.

[2] http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org.

6. In this process, special emphasis was placed on:

(a) Widening the human rights foundation of the protection of children from violence;

(b) Enhancing awareness and consolidating knowledge for the prevention and elimination of violence against children;

(c) Reinforcing regional processes and governance mechanisms to support implementation efforts;

(d) Strengthening strategic alliances, within and beyond the United Nations system, to build a world where children enjoy freedom from violence.

The active and ethical participation of children in achieving progress on the mandate's goals has remained a priority, supported through the development of child-friendly resources and the promotion of national, regional and international networks and platforms for information sharing and learning.

Box 1
Highlights of the 2009-2012 mandate

- *Widening the human rights foundation of the protection of children from violence*: 21 additional ratifications of the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography
- *Enhancing awareness and consolidating knowledge for the prevention and elimination of violence against children*: seven expert consultations, five thematic reports on priority topics, and information and communications materials
- *Reinforcing regional processes and governance mechanisms to support implementation of the Study recommendations*: regional cooperation frameworks to promote national follow-up to the Study in seven regions
- *Global survey to assess progress in children's protection from violence*: more than 100 Governments contributed information
- *Strengthening strategic partnerships within and beyond the United Nations system*: strong cooperation with United Nations actors; a growing alliance of Governments, civil society organizations, academics and children's organizations; over 70 field missions to more than 40 countries to support national progress

A. Widening the human rights foundation of the protection of children from violence

7. In collaboration with United Nations partners, in May 2010 the Special Representative launched a campaign for the universal ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. During the campaign, the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography

received 21 additional ratifications;[3] it is currently in force in 158 States. At least 23 other States made formal commitments to ratify the latter Optional Protocol in the framework of the universal periodic review process of the Human Rights Council, the Committee on the Rights of the Child or other human rights mechanisms. Of the 35 States not yet parties to the Optional Protocol, 50 per cent have ratified the Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women, and 75 per cent International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour, which address similar areas of concern.

8. The goal of universal ratification was also incorporated in the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons (General Assembly resolution 64/293, annex) and the Roadmap for Achieving the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour by 2016,[4] and widely endorsed by regional organizations, Member States, ombudspersons for children and civil society organizations. The Council of Europe launched a campaign to stop sexual violence against children, featuring the ratification of the Optional Protocol as a core component.

9. The normative foundation of the protection of children from violence was further strengthened by other developments supported by the Special Representative, including the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure, ILO Convention No. 189 on decent work for domestic workers, and the United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems. She also contributed to the general comment of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence.

B. Enhancing awareness and consolidating knowledge

10. To gain deeper understanding of the root causes and risk factors of violence, and to identify positive experience and strategic recommendations in order to assist Governments in their national implementation efforts, the Special Representative organized seven expert consultations on priority topics and developed special reports and communication materials to support advocacy and to enhance political action and social support for the prevention and elimination of violence against children.

11. In the preceding years, the Special Representative held three expert consultations: on child-sensitive counselling, complaint and reporting mechanisms in relation to incidents of violence; on children's legal protection from violence; and on the promotion of safe and violence-free schools. The conclusions and recommendations of those consultations (see A/66/277, A/HRC/19/64 and A/HRC/16/56) remain strongly relevant for the work ahead.

12. As detailed below, in 2012 the Special Representative organized three additional consultations: on the protection of children from harmful practices; on the prevention of and responses to violence against children within the juvenile justice system; and on the consolidation of data and research to inform policy and action against violence. In September 2012, a fourth consultation is scheduled, on the prevention of violence in early childhood.

[3] As of 31 July 2012.

[4] Outcome document of the Global Child Labour Conference 2010, held at The Hague.

1. Prevention of and responses to violence against children within the justice system

13. In January 2012 the Special Representative organized an expert consultation on the prevention of and responses to violence against children within the justice system, together with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Government of Austria.

14. At the consultation, in which governmental experts and representatives of United Nations agencies, international and regional organizations, human rights bodies, academia and civil society participated, a set of practical recommendations to assist States and other actors in the development of a violence-free justice system for children was drawn up. Those recommendations, included in a joint report to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/21/25), address the following issues:

(a) *Preventing the criminalization and penalization of children.* The prevention and reduction of situations leading to the deprivation of children's liberty is a critical strategy for decreasing the risk of violence in the criminal justice system. States should pursue this goal by: (i) decriminalizing "status offences", such as begging, vagrancy, truancy and loitering; (ii) preventing the detention of unaccompanied migrant children and asylum seekers on the basis of their status; (iii) ensuring that children with mental health and substance abuse problems are appropriately cared for, rather than dealt with by the criminal justice system; (iv) ensuring universal birth registration, raising the age of criminal responsibility to at least 12 years and continuing to raise it further, and ensuring non-custodial options for children below that age; and (v) supporting the prevention of criminalization and penalization through a robust and well-resourced child protection system, with effective coordination between the justice, social welfare and education sectors.

(b) *Protecting children from all forms of violence within the juvenile justice system.* National laws, policies and procedures concerning juvenile justice should be brought into full compliance with relevant international standards, and juvenile justice reforms should pursue a child- and gender-sensitive approach and be guided by child rights principles and safeguards, including (i) the recognition of the deprivation of children's liberty as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate time; (ii) the separation of children from adults and of girls from boys in a child-sensitive environment; (iii) the explicit prohibition of and effective protection of children from violence, including as a form of punishment, treatment or sentencing; (iv) the legal provision of safe and child-sensitive counselling, reporting and complaints mechanisms to prevent and respond to incidents of violence; and (v) the establishment of independent oversight and monitoring mechanisms and accountability systems for the inspection of places of detention and the prompt investigation of incidents of violence against children.

(c) *Ensuring the use of diversion and alternative non-custodial measures.* Effective alternative mechanisms to formal criminal proceedings and to deprivation of liberty should be developed and used, including restorative justice, mediation, probation, community service and community-based programmes, including treatment for children with substance abuse problems.

(d) *Ensuring qualified and trained personnel.* A sound system of selection, recruitment and retention of competent professionals should be put in place, supported by continued education and capacity-building on children's rights and juvenile justice standards to prevent violence against children in the juvenile justice system.

2. Protection from harmful practices in plural legal systems

15. Throughout the world, countless numbers of girls and boys fall victims to harmful practices, including female genital mutilation or cutting, early and forced marriage, degrading initiation rites, breast ironing, son preference, stoning, honour killings, forced feeding, witchcraft rituals and many other less-known forms of harmful practice. Often violent in nature, these practices compromise the development and education of the child, have serious and long-lasting health and psychological consequences, and may result in disability or death.

16. Despite the call made in the Study for all harmful practices to be prohibited by law, this is not the reality in many countries around the world. In some cases, general legislation on assault and bodily injury is applicable but rarely used or enforced, because of the social acceptance of those deeply entrenched practices. In other cases, different practices are compartmentalized in distinct pieces of legislation, hampering the consideration of commonalities and shared root causes and the promotion of a common holistic strategy. In countries with plural legal systems, where national legislation interplays with customary and religious law, legal interpretation and implementation face greater complexities, tensions and challenges that may seriously compromise children's best interests.

17. In order to reflect on these questions and identify opportunities for change, the Special Representative and Plan International, in close cooperation with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), OHCHR and the International NGO Council on Violence against Children co-hosted an international expert consultation.

18. The consultation considered significant developments where law reform and enforcement, supported by awareness-raising and a widely participatory social mobilization process, have helped to address deeply rooted social conventions and promote the abandonment of harmful practices against children.

19. Inconsistencies in legal regulation, selective implementation and compliance, and insufficient resources, together with lack of awareness within communities, prejudices among personnel and weak capacity to address children's rights among law enforcement officials, the judiciary, traditional leaders and judges in customary and religious courts were identified as critical challenges.

20. The outcomes of the expert consultation are set out in a thematic report, to be launched during the commemoration of the 2012 International Day of the Girl Child, and include the following overarching recommendations:

(a) Legislation plays a crucial role in the social process of abandonment of harmful practices against girls and boys, and is a core dimension of States' accountability for the protection of children from violence; this includes the obligation to ensure harmonization of all legislation, including customary and religious laws, with international human rights standards, and to ensure the establishment of a legal definition of the child in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

(b) National legislation should include a clear and comprehensive prohibition of all harmful practices, secure the protection of children from all forms of violence and remove any justification of such practices that may compromise the

safeguard of the best interests of the child, including their promotion in the name of honour or tradition; in this regard, the intent to cause harm is not a prerequisite for the definition of violence.

(c) Law reform is a long-term and ongoing process, necessary to recognize and safeguard children's rights, to fill protection gaps and address emerging practices and manifestations of violence; it needs to be supported by prevention and implementation efforts, including birth registration, awareness-raising, education and training, and mobilization of communities, including religious and local leaders and children, to promote dialogue and positive cultural values, enhance understanding about the detrimental impact of certain practices and support commitment by those concerned to the lasting abandonment of harmful attitudes and behaviour.

(d) Sound data collection and analysis, and cross-country and cross-regional sharing of good practices in legislation and implementation are needed to gain a deeper understanding of, and help to address, the complex dimensions associated with social conventions, beliefs and practices, as well as to inform legislative, administrative, educational, social and other measures to promote the sustained abandonment of harmful practices against children.

3. Building knowledge for change

21. Sound research and reliable, objective and disaggregated child-related data are indispensable to understand the environment within which children grow and develop, to assess the risk or impact of violence on their development and to prevent its occurrence. This is an area where there are many gaps. Although there is recognition of the need to build upon a broad definition of violence, including its various manifestations, physical, psychological and sexual, there is no standard categorization of its different forms. Owing to the absence of internationally agreed methodologies for data collection, different standards and practices have been followed, including for ensuring the protection of respondents and interviewers and follow-up support to victims.

22. There is limited evidence concerning the extent, impact and risks of violence, and the underlying social norms and attitudes that perpetuate its existence. Too often, data collected are not analysed, disseminated or used to shape policy and implement action, and insights into what works in the areas of prevention and response fail to be taken into consideration when decisions are being taken and resource allocations considered.

23. At the same time, there are promising developments. The release of the Study paved the way to the development of significant national surveys addressing the magnitude and consequences of violence, and attitudes and behaviour in relation to that phenomenon.

24. To draw on this growing body of knowledge and experience, in June 2012 the Special Representative joined with the Government of Sweden in the organization of an expert consultation on strengthening data and research to protect children from violence. The consultation, held in Sweden, provided a strategic platform for learning from and building upon initiatives promoted by a wide range of partners, including Governments, United Nations agencies, academics, children's rights

bodies and institutions, and civil society organizations. The expert consultation put forward the following conclusions and recommendations:

(a) Although data and research on violence against children remain scarce and fragmented, significant recent initiatives provide a sound foundation for informing evidence-based advocacy, policies and decisions to prevent and address that phenomenon.

(b) Urgent efforts should be promoted in areas where gaps have been identified, including: (i) the incidence of violence during the life cycle of the child and across risk situations, such as children in care and justice institutions, children living and/or working on the street, children with disabilities, indigenous children and those belonging to minorities; (ii) children's exposure to violence in periods of economic crisis, social instability and natural disaster; (iii) cost-effective interventions for the prevention and early detection of violence and for the recovery and reintegration of child victims and witnesses; (iv) the human and social cost of violence, and return on investment in prevention.

(c) Together with initiatives to develop robust, credible and accurate data and research, it is vital to integrate information across sectors, disciplines and data sources, keeping the human dignity and best interests of the child as central concerns in the assessment of the cumulative impact of different manifestations of violence over the child's life cycle.

(d) Children's perceptions, views and experiences are crucial for understanding the hidden face of violence and helping to address its root causes. The importance of children's role in data gathering, analysis, writing up and dissemination is undeniable, but their involvement remains confronted with significant challenges and dilemmas, including the need to avoid patronizing or manipulative approaches and situations that may place children at risk, and to promote solutions that genuinely balance the imperative need to protect children from harm with their right to express their views and influence decisions. This is an area where further research is required to explore the complexities, tensions and opportunities of children's involvement, and to reflect on core ethical dimensions which should guide national initiatives and capacity-building efforts.

(e) It is crucial to bridge the gap between the acquisition of knowledge and its translation into action. Still too often, existing data are not analysed or made public and fail to inform advocacy, policymaking and the allocation of resources, or to promote changes in attitude and behaviour for the prevention and elimination of violence. It is critical to invest in communication and better presentation of evidence in order to assist decision makers; to promote evidence-based programmes adapted to local contexts; and to widen the ownership of implementation efforts by the public at large.

(f) Data and research are not politically neutral. They provide transparency to policymaking, and make possible public scrutiny of States' actions for and achievements in the protection of children from violence. This is an area where the leadership and commitment of Governments may be most meaningfully expressed by placing the best interests of the child above the temptation of preserving a positive political image. It is therefore heartening to acknowledge the significant national surveys conducted recently that have exposed serious gaps and concerns relating to violence against children, while laying the foundation for the

development of a well-informed and targeted policy agenda to address persisting challenges and strengthen the overall system of protection of children's rights.

C. Reinforcing regional processes and governance mechanisms in support of national implementation efforts

25. Collaboration with regional organizations and institutions is a cornerstone of the Special Representative's strategy to accelerate progress in the implementation of the Study recommendations. Those partnerships are aimed at developing policy platforms to sustain and scale up positive developments, identify concerns and challenges, and mobilize action to safeguard children from violence.

26. Decisive progress has been made in this area, with the growing institutionalization of regional governance mechanisms and the adoption of political commitments concerning violence against children in eight regions.[5]

27. To strengthen synergies between regions, in 2011 the Special Representative hosted a high-level round table at the United Nations, at which regional institutions launched significant studies assessing progress in protecting children from violence. Those studies constitute a key component of the information hub developed by the Special Representative's office to support knowledge-sharing, the cross-fertilization of experience and South-South cooperation.

28. Over the past year, the regional process of follow-up has been further strengthened, with the organization of three regional consultations: in Central America, in December 2011, hosted in Santo Domingo by the Government of the Dominican Republic; in the Caribbean region, in May 2012, hosted in Kingston by the Government of Jamaica in cooperation with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM); and in South Asia, in May 2012, hosted in Colombo by the Government of Sri Lanka, with the South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children and the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation.

29. In addition, the Special Representative agreed upon a regional cooperation framework with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, for which protection of children against violence constitutes a priority of its five-year workplan;[6] held two review meetings with the League of Arab States in October 2011 and June 2012 to advance implementation of commitments made on the protection of children from violence; and pursued her close cooperation with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, including through the co-organization of the consultation on the protection of children from harmful practices (see paras. 17-20 above). Cooperation was also pursued with the Council of Europe, which adopted its 2012-2015 Strategy for the Rights of the Child, highlighting the elimination of all forms of violence against children as a core objective; and with the European Union in the framework of its Agenda for the Rights of the Child and review of its Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child.

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[5] See *Political Commitments by Regional Organizations and Institutions to Prevent and Address Violence against Children*, http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/publications.

[6] www.asean.org/26775.htm.

30. The promotion of regional cooperation has remained essential to support national implementation efforts and strengthen the prevention and elimination of violence against children in all settings. The box below illustrates critical outcomes reached in the Latin American and Caribbean region in close cooperation with Member States and the Latin American Chapter of the Global Movement for Children.

Box 2
Highlights of progress in the Americas, 2009-2012

- Three political declarations (Asunción, Santo Domingo and Kingston Declarations)
- Three subregional road maps
- Three subregional analytical studies
- Three regional manifestos by children and adolescents
- Institutionalized regional review (MERCOSUR and CARICOM)
- Multi-stakeholder collaboration at the regional and national levels
- National agendas developed in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Paraguay and the Plurinational State of Bolivia (declaring 2012 the Year of Non-violence against Children)
- Advocacy for law reform in Brazil, Costa Rica and Peru

D. Strengthening strategic alliances to accelerate progress

31. Building and strengthening partnerships within and beyond the United Nations system remains a priority of the Special Representative's mandate.

1. Enhancing partnerships with Governments and within the United Nations system

32. Strategic cooperation with Governments and stakeholders has been crucial to accelerating national progress and influencing positive changes in the lives of children, including by raising awareness, supporting the development of comprehensive national strategies, securing children's legal protection from violence and consolidating data systems and research in this field.

33. The Special Representative conducted over 70 missions and visited more than 40 countries[7] in all regions to advance national initiatives and bring the mandate closer to national stakeholders and the public at large. During country visits and in her direct dialogue with Governments to advance implementation of the Study and provide expert advice, she raised a wide range of themes and concerns, including the

[7] Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, China, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Ghana, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Lebanon, Morocco, Nepal, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, the United Republic of Tanzania and the United States of America. Her office was represented at events in Mexico, South Africa and Uruguay.

universal ratification of human rights instruments, the enactment of legislation to ban all forms of violence and establish effective child-sensitive counselling, reporting and complaint mechanisms, data and research initiatives to inform policymaking, promotion of the prevention of and responses to violence against children in their early years, as well as their protection in schools and care and justice institutions.

34. Governments' participation in the expert consultations organized by the Special Representative, as well as in the numerous thematic events held at the United Nations, has been particularly relevant for the sharing of national experience and good practice, and for reflecting on persisting challenges and gaps. Member States have been key players in the promotion of regional consultations and the shaping of regional and national agendas on violence against children. Currently, more than two thirds of Member States participate in regional cooperation frameworks for the protection of children from violence, a trend that it is expected to continue to grow.

35. Institutional collaboration within the United Nations system, including funds, programmes and specialized agencies, and human rights treaty bodies and mechanisms, has been central for raising awareness and galvanizing global support for the protection of children from violence, for promoting the mainstreaming of this topic in United Nations activities, and for informing the international policy agenda on violence against children through the organization of strategic panel discussions. With mutually supportive mandates, associating normative and operational organizations, all partners share a common human rights approach and a determination to build a world free from violence.

36. Further decisive steps were taken with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and with other strategic allies to promote accelerated progress towards the universal ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

37. The Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence against Children, chaired by the Special Representative, has remained a crucial mechanism of institutional collaboration in support of the mandate. Its periodic meetings are a key forum for consultation, policy formulation and mainstreaming on the United Nations agenda of the protection of children from violence. In 2012, that cooperation informed the organization of expert consultations on data and research on violence against children and on the prevention of and responses to violence in the justice system.

38. Partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been further strengthened, at headquarters and in the field. UNICEF provided critical support to field missions, to the organization of regional and expert consultations to advance implementation of the Study and consolidate national child protection systems and to the promotion of the Global Progress Survey on Violence against Children.

39. Collaboration with OHCHR and the human rights treaty bodies and mechanisms continued to feature high on the Special Representative's agenda. Her collaboration with the Committee on the Rights of the Child focused on the development of General Comment No. 13 on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence (CRC/C/GC/13), the new Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure, and the joint general recommendation/comment on harmful practices of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, currently under preparation.

40. The Special Representative participated in key policy discussions to promote the consideration of violence against children as a cross-cutting concern on the United Nations agenda. This included cooperation with UNODC on violence against children in the justice system, during the thematic debate held by the Human Rights Council, and with UN-Women on gender-based violence and the legal protection of girls from violence and harmful practices, during the Commission on the Status of Women and in the lead-up to the International Day of the Girl Child. Strategic cooperation was also pursued with United Nations partners to prevent and minimize the impact of armed and gang violence on children, including through policies that help to reduce the availability of and access to small arms.

41. Collaboration with ILO was further pursued, helping to highlight incidents of violence endured by children in settings where they work, including in the framework of the implementation of the Roadmap for Achieving the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour by 2016 and the commemoration of the World Day against Child Labour.

42. In 2012, new strategic partnerships were developed. In the framework of her collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Special Representative joined the Violence Prevention Alliance, which brings together WHO member States, international agencies, academia and civil society organizations.[8] The Alliance adopted a strategic plan of action for the period 2012-2020, which constitutes a valuable asset for the implementation of the priorities of the mandate on policy and legal reform, and data and research, as it is aimed at unifying global efforts in support of national goals for the prevention of violence, and the implementation of evidence-based strategies on good parenting, life skills, social norms, the risks of firearm-related deaths and injuries, and services for victims. Participation in the fifth Milestones of a Global Campaign for Violence Prevention Meeting in 2011 became an important resource for the expert consultation on data and research on violence against children (see para. 24 above), in view of the new evidence presented on effective interventions to prevent interpersonal violence and promote increased collaboration across sectors and disciplines.

43. With a view to strengthening partnerships and knowledge-sharing for law reform and the introduction of an explicit legal prohibition on all forms of violence against children, the Special Representative joined the Global Forum on Law, Justice and Development, promoted under the auspices of the World Bank. The Forum provides a dynamic framework for consolidating and disseminating knowledge on legal responses to development issues, connecting Governments, think tanks, regional and international organizations, international financial institutions and civil society organizations with relevant research and practice.

44. The Special Representative also joined the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues, which supports the mandate of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. This important partnership and the collaboration with the Permanent Forum open avenues for a strengthened attention to the protection of indigenous children from violence and the consolidation of efforts to prevent its occurrence.

[8] www.who.int/violenceprevention/en/.

2 Consolidating cooperation with civil society

45. Civil society actors play a decisive role in the implementation of the recommendations of the Study and have been critical partners in promoting the ratification of core treaties relating to children's rights, in the consolidation of regional networks and in the promotion of expert discussions. Cooperation has been greatly facilitated by the International NGO Council on Violence against Children and its advocacy and social mobilization efforts with partners at the international, regional and national levels. The Special Representative joined the launch of the NGO Council's report entitled *Five Years On: A Global Update on Violence against Children*, which documents areas of progress, while presenting evidence of incidents of violence against children in different settings and regions. The report was a valuable contribution to the global survey conducted to monitor progress in the implementation of the Study recommendations. Strategic collaboration was further pursued with the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Working Group on Violence against Children, as well as with Child Helpline International and its network.

46. The Special Representative's collaboration with faith-based organizations to strengthen the protection of children from violence gained further impetus. In the context of the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children, initiated by a global movement of religious leaders and communities of all faiths and secular organizations committed to children's rights, significant initiatives were supported on the anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to promote the ending of violence against children. Partner organizations Religions for Peace and the Centre for Interfaith Action launched an important initiative entitled "Ten promises to our children",[9] which constitutes a valuable platform for harnessing the potential of religious communities to mobilize action to combat violence against children and to ensure that children grow up in a safe and protective environment. Similarly, the Fourth Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children, held in June 2012 in Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania, in which the Special Representative participated, adopted an important declaration of commitment to action against all forms of violence against children and harmful practices.[10]

3. Strengthening cooperation with young people

47. Children's participation was an essential contribution to the development of the Study and remains a core dimension of its follow-up process. Through field visits, regional initiatives and the global survey, the Special Representative has met and consulted with hundreds of children and, with the support of partners, benefited from the views and perspectives shared by thousands more.

48. Children participated in the regional consultations held in South and Central America, the Caribbean and South Asia, contributing their own declarations and recommendations which, in some cases, were integrated into the regional road maps adopted by Government representatives.

49. Children and young people contributed to the global survey, through their assessment of progress and identification of priorities for the future. Their recommendations reveal a remarkable resilience as well as a decisive determination to raise awareness, generate solidarity and support for child victims and instil

[9] www.cifa.org/pledge-for-life.html.

[10] www.gnrc.net/en/aboutus/fourthforum/declaration.html.

confidence to report incidents and seek redress. But impatience is growing and, as they stressed at the Caribbean consultation, "we do not want the mere comfort of hearing that we will be heard; promises need to materialize into tangible action", with improved legislation, increased mobilization and accessible services of quality, monitoring and reporting mechanisms and real resource allocation for bringing violence to an end.

III. Global survey on violence against children

50. In 2011, five years after the submission of the Study to the General Assembly, the Special Representative launched a global survey to assess progress in the prevention and elimination of violence against children, to gain perspective on achievements made, to reflect on good practices and factors of success, and to boost efforts to overcome persisting challenges and consolidate the prevention and elimination of violence. The survey findings are a critical reference for the mandate and for shaping a forward-looking strategy to speed up progress in achieving the protection of children from violence.

51. The survey was partly based on a questionnaire prepared in 2004 during the development of the Study, and aligned with the Study's 12 overarching recommendations. In addition to the replies received to the questionnaire, the survey findings were informed by research, regional consultations and analytical reviews of violence against children conducted in the framework of the Special Representative's mandate,[11] and by international monitoring processes, including the universal periodic review process of the Human Rights Council, reporting to human rights treaty bodies, and the follow-up to the World Congresses against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents and to the 2010 Roadmap for Achieving the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour by 2016.

52. The survey was conducted in collaboration with a wide range of partners, including Governments, United Nations agencies, regional organizations and institutions and civil society organizations. Children and young people were important allies in this process. To capture their views and recommendations the Special Representative promoted, in close collaboration with civil society partners, a child-friendly version of the survey.

53. More than 100 Governments submitted contributions to the Global Survey.[12] Overall, these paint an insightful picture of significant national legal, policy and

[11] Regional reviews were conducted by the League of Arab States, MERCOSUR, Central American countries, the Council of Europe and the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children.

[12] Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Djibouti, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Estonia, Finland, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kiribati, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Libya, Lithuania, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Norway, Oman, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, the Syrian Arab Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen and the Palestinian Authority.

institutional developments, and of positive experiences, current gaps and priority areas of concern.

54. The analysis conducted so far reveals an evolving picture, a picture where violence against children is gaining visibility on the national agenda, with increasing legislative action, policy interventions and information campaigns to safeguard children's freedom from violence, and with some promising initiatives to capture the prevalence of this phenomenon.

55. However, progress remains uneven, with insufficient efforts to develop a cohesive and well-resourced national strategy on violence against children; uncoordinated policy interventions; dispersed and ill-enforced legislation; insufficient investment in family support, in capacity-building for professionals, and in safe and child-sensitive mechanisms to address incidents of violence; and overall, with scarce data and research to break the invisibility of this phenomenon and promote evidence-based decision-making.

56. Although the findings of the survey will be captured more fully in an analytical report to be issued later in 2012, the most significant highlights are presented below, with a special emphasis on the priority areas identified by the Special Representative's mandate.

A. National integrated strategy

57. In all regions, important efforts are being made to develop national agendas to prevent and eliminate violence against children. In their majority, Governments' responses indicate that they have a policy framework in place, be it a broad action plan on children or on child protection, or multiple strategies to address particular manifestations of violence or specific settings where incidents occur.

58. At the same time, less than 20 per cent of Governments indicate in their replies that they have a comprehensive agenda for preventing and responding to all forms of violence against children. Several Governments acknowledge that existing frameworks are fragmented or at various stages of development and that only in very few cases have sectoral policies been put in place to address violence in all settings. As a result, there remain significant gaps in the effective protection of children.

59. Coordination remains a challenge in many countries, with only two thirds of respondents acknowledging that a lead coordinating governmental institution is in place to oversee action relating to violence against children. In a number of cases, multiple coordinating bodies have been established, but the collaboration between them is uneven and not always effective. Overall, enhanced efforts are still required to secure an institutionalized process of coordination across central departments, and between national and decentralized authorities. This concern is also highlighted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its concluding observations.

60. Two other areas call for further attention. First, monitoring mechanisms to assess progress are still lacking in the vast majority of countries, and evaluation of implementation efforts remains the exception. Second, although there has been some allocation of, at times very limited, national resources for children, very few Governments set aside specific funding for violence-related interventions, and most of them acknowledge an insufficient availability of human and financial resources to support implementation efforts in this area.

61. While stronger efforts remain critically needed, the following lessons, also highlighted by the above-mentioned regional reviews, can help guide the work ahead:

(a) It remains urgent to promote a national child-centred, integrated, multidisciplinary and time-bound strategy on violence against children and to mainstream the protection of children from violence as a concern for all relevant central and decentralized authorities and as a core component of the national policy agenda;

(b) It is critical to establish effective high-level coordinating mechanisms with the necessary authority and influence, and to clarify the role and responsibilities of departments and institutions dealing with violence against children in order both to avoid overlap and to promote synergies, and to train relevant professionals on child-sensitive violence prevention and response mechanisms;

(c) The allocation of resources for violence-related action is indispensable, including at the decentralized level;

(d) The active involvement of all stakeholders, including academia, civil society and child-led organizations, is crucial for a successful process of implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

B. Legal protection of children

62. The survey confirms that there have been important legislative developments to secure the protection of children from violence. Over 80 per cent of respondents indicate that they have a significant body of laws on violence, consisting either of overall legal prohibition or separate pieces of legislation addressing the various manifestations of violence. At the same time, the gap between law and implementation remains wide and challenging.

63. The protection of children from sexual exploitation is the area where most decisive progress has been made. Over 90 per cent of respondents highlight a legal prohibition of sexual violence against children, including prostitution; a ban on the procurement or offering of children for pornography, and on the possession and dissemination of images of child abuse, including via the Internet. Information from United Nations reports, including concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, confirm an accelerated rate of legislative activity in this area, although additional serious efforts remain necessary to promote effective implementation and address gaps and emerging concerns, including the protection of children from sale, the rise in child trafficking, the low number of prosecutions, the lack of data and the limited allocation of resources.[13]

64. Although dimensions of the problem such as those mentioned above will require considerable work, this is an area where the positive influence of sustained advocacy and mobilization efforts can be seen, including efforts in support of the campaign for the ratification and implementation of the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and of the follow-up to the World Congresses against the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents.

[13] See, for example, International Labour Office, *Accelerating Action against Child Labour* (2010); UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons* (2009); International Organization for Migration, *IOM 2011 Case Data on Human Trafficking: Global Figures & Trends* (2012).

65. Responses to the survey also confirm that the adoption of legislation banning the use of violence as a form of punishment or sentencing is gaining momentum, with more than 60 per cent of the responding States mentioning having in place a legal prohibition of inhuman sentencing, including life imprisonment and capital punishment. More than 20 per cent of responding States report having a comprehensive ban on corporal punishment in all settings in place and over 50 per cent a partial prohibition.

66. Almost all States have, in their laws, provided for specific penalties for perpetrators of violence against children. However, prevention has not received a similar attention. Indeed, although many respondents touch on this topic, very few report the existence of a comprehensive legal framework to prevent incidents of violence.

67. Similarly, while legislation on recovery and reintegration of child victims is mentioned in more than half of the replies, legal redress for acts of violence, including compensation, is reported by only 13 per cent of the respondents.

68. Child-sensitive counselling, reporting and complaint mechanisms constitute another area lacking investment. Although some respondents mention the availability of helplines and police services, in most cases child-focused mechanisms either are not in place or are ill-resourced, lacking human and financial capacity to address children's concerns; in the majority of cases, national independent institutions are not available. Reporting on incidents of violence frequently remains a challenge, with very few States having issued guidance for professionals working for and with children, and only 25 per cent having clear provisions on mandatory reporting. The guiding principles and recommendations presented by the Special Representative in a previous report on this matter (A/HRC/16/56) remain fully relevant.

69. Another significant gap revealed by the survey is the dearth of data on laws, policies and advocacy on the gender dimensions of violence and the legal protection of girls: 40 per cent of the respondents provide no information in that regard, and less than 30 per cent mention positive initiatives. Legislation remains a challenge, with less than half of the Governments indicating the enactment of a legal ban on harmful practices, which may fully or only partially cover female genital mutilation/cutting, child or forced marriage, witchcraft rituals, honour killings and other practices.

70. Less than 30 per cent of respondents indicate 18 as the minimum age for marriage, with younger ages and different thresholds for boys and girls prevalent in a large number of countries. This is an area to which the Special Representative has paid special attention, including through the consultation on children's protection from harmful practices (see paras. 17-20 above).

71. Over the past few years, law reform on violence against children has gained momentum, with important pieces of national legislation having been introduced in a large number of areas. However, this wide-ranging process has been insufficient to secure a clear and all-embracing prohibition of all forms of violence. Steady and enhanced efforts are needed in the years ahead and it remains urgent to enact such an explicit national legal ban, supplemented by detailed provisions in relevant pieces of legislation to guide effective enforcement. Legislation needs to address the root causes and risk factors of violence, lend effective protection to children in situations of vulnerability, and be supported by well-resourced child protection

services, well-trained professionals and a wide participatory process of public awareness-raising and social mobilization.

C. Sound data and research

72. Good data and research are the bedrock of national planning, effective policymaking and adequate resource allocation to prevent violence and secure the protection of children. Despite incremental initiatives to break the invisibility of violence and mobilize action to address it, the global survey confirms that information on violence against children remains scarce and fragmented, with limited data available on the extent and impact of violence against children, the risk factors involved and the underlying attitudes and social norms that perpetuate such violence. As a result, there is a costly impact on child victims and witnesses, on their families, and on society as a whole.

73. While some Governments mention statistical information gathered by certain departments, including health, labour, judicial and law enforcement institutions, very few have periodic analytical reports on children's exposure to violence.

74. Overall, there is lack of comprehensive and disaggregated data systems to inform strategic interventions in this area. Although 55 per cent of the Governments report collecting some data, those efforts are often not child-specific; over 10 per cent indicate no collection of relevant data and around 30 per cent provide no information on this section of the survey.

75. In most cases, information is obtained from broad categories, such as domestic violence, or limited to a few areas, such as crime, with limited disaggregation on the basis of gender, age, social origin or disability.

76. The coordination of data sources remains challenging, with multiple institutions gathering and handling dispersed information, based on different definitions and indicators. When a central institution is in place, the information is often collected from limited sources, or only addresses some manifestations of violence or settings within which it occurs. Moreover, there is seldom regular periodicity of data-gathering efforts. Likewise, there is often a lack of coordination between statistical bodies and institutions responsible for the design and implementation of policies to protect children from violence. As a result, it is difficult to gain a holistic view of the incidence and cumulative impact of violence on children, to address neglected areas or to enable the prevention of violence to have a genuine chance of succeeding.

77. Two other major gaps are identified by the responses: lack of resources; and lack of clear definitions and monitoring tools and indicators. These factors hamper the collection of timely, reliable and disaggregated data, the monitoring of progress, and the evaluation of the cost-effectiveness and impact of interventions.

78. As noted by the above-mentioned regional reviews, investment in this area remains urgent and vital to support effective action. In this regard, the conclusions and recommendations of the expert consultation on data and research (see para. 24 above) are an important reference for future initiatives.

IV. Accelerating progress in a complex global environment

79. The analysis of Governments' responses, together with the overall findings of the global survey, constitutes a crucial reference for the work ahead. First, it confirms the relevance and urgency of consolidating and scaling up initiatives to achieve the three priority goals pursued under the Special Representative's mandate, namely, developing a well-coordinated and well-resourced national agenda on violence against children, enacting a comprehensive and explicit legal ban on all forms of violence, and consolidating data and research to inform accelerated progress in this field.

80. Second, the work conducted over the past three years has also helped to gain a better understanding of the multidimensional nature of violence and of the need to maintain a holistic view of the child when initiatives for the prevention and elimination of violence are pursued. It is critical to address the cumulative exposure of girls and boys to various manifestations of violence in different contexts, and throughout the child's life cycle. Indeed, for children at risk, violence in the home, in the school and in the community is a continuum, spilling over from one setting to another, and at times persisting across generations.

81. Third, violence does not take place in a vacuum. Indeed, children's vulnerability, as well as genuine opportunities for preventing violence and for responding to it are strongly affected by such important factors as poverty and vulnerability, climate change and natural disasters, and armed violence and organized crime.

Poverty, human development and economic crisis

82. Children are at the heart of the Millennium Declaration and Development Goals. Progress in their achievement contributes to a protective and safe environment for children, within which children can develop to their full potential. At the same time, violence remains a serious factor hampering the effective attainment of the Goals, especially for the most marginalized children, including those marginalized as a result of poverty, disability, HIV infection or gender.

83. The relationship between poverty and violence is multifaceted and strongly interconnected. Humiliation, bullying, stigmatization and exploitation are frequent components of the daily life of children growing up in poverty. Violence and deprivation have a cumulative impact on their development, with high risks of poor health, poor school performance and long-term welfare dependency.

84. Poverty, vulnerability and economic hardship are factors of stress in the community and in the home, generating a higher incidence of violence, including domestic violence. As families struggle to meet their basic needs, children may be pressed to drop out from school to contribute to household income; girls may be placed at risk of involvement in hazardous economic activities, including domestic service, begging and sexual exploitation; or forced to marry, the risk of getting married before the age of 18 being three times higher among poor girls.[14]

85. Children growing up in poverty are less likely to access basic social services of quality or to benefit from effective preventive initiatives or protection mechanisms. This is a particularly acute problem for children living or working on the street, who

[14] UNICEF, "Child protection from violence, exploitation and abuse: a statistical snapshot", June 2011, p. 3.

often struggle to survive in unhealthy, hazardous and violent public spaces where crime is rampant and protection hardly available, and who are at risk of enduring ill-treatment by the authorities or being criminalized for survival behaviour, including truancy and begging.[15]

86. Children with disabilities are also at heightened risk of abuse, neglect, stigma and exploitation. In their lives, disability, poverty, poor health care and nutrition, and social exclusion often go hand in hand. The incidence of disability is higher among children belonging to poorer households, where they lack access to basic social services of quality, thus compromising opportunities for early detection, treatment and recovery, and for meaningful participation in social life. As families of children with disabilities face extra medical, housing and transport costs, they miss employment opportunities and face marginalization and aggravated vulnerability to violence. When placed in institutions, where they have limited ability to disclose situations of abuse and seek redress, children's vulnerability to violence is further exacerbated.

87. Poverty and violence also shape the life of the majority of children affected by HIV and AIDS. The pandemic has stripped away traditional social support networks and is associated with a higher risk of social exclusion, stigma and discrimination, school dropout and limited access to information and treatment, while paving the way to enhanced risks of violence. In turn, rape, intimate partner violence and sexual abuse, as well as harmful practices, including child and forced marriage, increase the risk of exposure to HIV infection.[16]

88. As the current economic downturn confirms, in times of economic crisis the impact of those multiple factors increases. Although initially buffered from the financial crisis, low-income countries soon felt its impact, with a slowdown in international trade, severely stretched Government budgets and uncertainty concerning foreign aid. According to some studies, additional numbers of people trapped in poverty in 2009 ranged from 50 million to 90 million.[17] Vulnerable children are particularly affected, with estimates that, in sub-Saharan Africa, as many as 50,000 infant deaths in 2009 were linked to the global financial crisis.[18] At the household level, insecurity in employment and pressure on resources, including as a result of rises in food and fuel prices, have increased the vulnerability of families with a growing risk of tension and violence.

89. Economically advanced countries are also implementing severe cutbacks in social spending and are promoting budgetary austerity measures to reduce national debt and boost their economies. In some cases, cuts in child benefits in the area of education have hampered families' ability to buy schoolbooks and cover the cost of their children's meals and transportation, while child labour in the informal sector and in agriculture may be on the rise as a result of shrinking family income. As recently highlighted by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, increasingly difficult socioeconomic situations for families and high levels of stress and pressure can result in serious risks of domestic violence towards children and need to be carefully monitored.[19]

[15] OHCHR, *Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Children Working and/or Living on the Street* (2012), p. 13.

[16] UNAIDS, *Together we will end AIDS* (2012), p. 70.

[17] "The economic crisis and the Millennium Development Goals", World Bank, 2012.

[18] "Economic crises taking a toll on children", World Bank, 2011.

[19] Council of Europe, CommDH (2012)22, 10 July 2012, para. 22.

A. Climate change and natural disasters

90. Climate change and natural disasters have a serious impact on human development and economic progress, contributing to the fragility of communities, stretching social services and support systems, and generating high levels of stress in communities and families. When associated with severe food insecurity or water scarcity, this situation may generate serious levels of social unrest, compromising children's well-being and placing them at heightened risk of neglect, injury and abuse.

91. Uncertainty associated with displacement, reduced options for escaping hardship and pressing needs to ensure survival and generate family income are some important factors behind violence, psychosocial distress, sexual abuse and the economic exploitation of children. Weakened protection in times of disaster, such as floods or earthquakes, may increase children's vulnerability to abandonment, sale or trafficking, and place adolescents at increased risk of recruitment into gang activity and urban violence.

B. Armed and community violence

92. Over the recent past, the boundaries between political, criminal and intimate violence have become increasingly blurred, provoking fear, insecurity and harm in families and in society at large. Children are particularly vulnerable to these intertwined forms of violence, both as victims and witnesses.

93. An estimated 526,000 people die violently every year; in the large majority of cases, in non-conflict settings.[20] Young males are at high risk of becoming the victims of homicide owing to their participation in street fighting, street crime, gang membership, possession of arms and other violence-prone activities.[21] Women and girls are predominantly targeted by intimate and gender-based violence and in many nations family-related homicide is the major cause of female deaths.

94. Poor rule of law and weak law enforcement performance facilitate the use of small arms, which in turn is associated with higher levels of homicide and organized crime and paves the way to a culture of impunity and increased levels of violence.

95. Lethal violence and lack of security also compromise human development, being associated with higher levels of poverty and hunger, lower primary education enrolment and higher infant mortality rates.[22] This pattern compromises the safeguard of children's safety and well-being, contributes to increased levels of domestic violence, and may disrupt access to health services, education and social support, deepening children's vulnerability and deprivation.

96. Children from disadvantaged communities are attractive targets for organized criminal activities. Through coercion, social pressure or the promise of financial reward, they are at risk of recruitment and manipulation to hold or deliver drugs or weapons, to carry out petty crime, to beg on the streets or to become involved in other exploitative activities. At the same time, for young people lacking genuine educational and economic opportunities and living in socially excluded and

[20] Geneva Declaration Secretariat, *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011*, p. 1.

[21] UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide* (2011), p. 12.

[22] *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011*, p. 146.

marginalized neighbourhoods, participation in gang culture may be perceived as a way of gaining status and recognition; according to some studies, as many as 15 per cent of all youth in gang-affected communities may end up joining a gang, 15 being the typical age of gang entry.[23]

97. Against this background, public fear of gang violence and youth crime has generated social pressure for the criminalization of children and adolescents, together with a call for a lower minimum age of criminal responsibility and longer sentences of imprisonment. This has been accompanied by media stigmatization of children belonging to disadvantaged groups and a culture of tolerance of institutionalized violence against them.

C. Cost of violence

98. Aggravated by poverty and vulnerability, climate change and natural disasters, armed violence and organized crime, violence is a serious risk for children's survival, health, education and development.

99. But beyond the cost to each individual victim, violence has serious costs for households, communities and national economies. As noted in a WHO study,

> meeting the direct costs of health, criminal justice, and social welfare responses to violence diverts many billions of dollars from more constructive societal spending. The much larger indirect costs of violence due to lost productivity and lost investment in education work together to slow economic development, increase socioeconomic inequality, and erode human and social capital.[24]

Investing in the prevention of violence is therefore of critical importance, not only as a question of human rights and good governance but also of good economics.

V. Looking ahead

100. The present report provides an overview of results achieved and progress promoted by the Special Representative and is intended to support the review of the mandate and its funding by the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session.[25]

101. The past few years have been marked by a consolidated commitment to preventing and eliminating violence against children. There has been a strengthened understanding of children's exposure to violence, while strategic actions have been undertaken to ensure their effective protection; significant normative, policy and institutional developments have helped to advance national implementation of the protection of children from violence, together with the revitalization of networks and the development of new partnerships to support advocacy and social mobilization, and the institutionalization of the follow-up to the Study recommendations by Governments, regional organizations and civil society actors.

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[23] Geneva Declaration Secretariat, *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2008*, p. 129.

[24] "Preventing violence and reducing its impact: how development agencies can help", WHO, 2008, p. 7.

[25] See General Assembly resolution 62/141, para. 58. In its resolution 19/37, adopted in April 2012, the Human Rights Council called for adequate and predictable financial support for the continued, effective and independent performance of the Special Representative's mandate.

102. Although significant progress has been achieved, this process needs nurturing to translate the vision of the Study into reality and to ensure that it takes root and results in real change for all children, at all times. As highlighted by the findings of the global survey, it is crucial to sustain achievements made, to scale up positive initiatives and to widen the ownership of this process of social change. In particular, it is essential to avoid any risk of stalling the momentum built up around the implementation of the Study or of allowing this agenda to become diluted in the face of competing priorities.

103. The Special Representative remains strongly committed to advancing progress with regard to children's freedom from violence. The results achieved and the lessons learned over the initial years of her mandate provide a strong foundation for sustaining investments, re-energizing efforts, addressing emerging concerns and promoting a paradigm shift in the safeguarding of children from violence.

104. **The next few years will be strategic for moving forward in that direction, but progress will be dependent on urgent and steady action, with special emphasis on the following priority dimensions.**

A. Mainstreaming the Study recommendations in the national policy agenda

105. **As noted throughout the present report, the three priorities of the mandate remain the foundation for achieving progress with regard to all the recommendations of the Study and have been identified by Governments across regions as crucial areas where progress needs to be achieved. Thus, putting in place a comprehensive, well-coordinated and well-resourced national agenda on violence against children; introducing an explicit legal prohibition of all forms of violence in all settings, supported by child-sensitive counselling, reporting and complaint mechanisms; and consolidating violence-related data and research are urgent and indispensable components of the future agenda.**

B. Addressing emerging concerns

106. **The spectrum of violence against children is not static and emerging concerns need to be further researched and seriously addressed. Among them, it will be important to explore the opportunities and counter the risks associated with the use of new information and communications technologies; and to prevent and address children's exposure to armed violence and organized crime.**

C. Tackling violence across children's life cycles

107. **Future initiatives need to be gender-sensitive, informed by children's perspectives and experience, and tailored to children's evolving stages of development. To prevent violence against them in their early years, investment in positive parenting, home visitation and early childhood care and development programmes will remain essential. To capitalize on young people's agency and potential, and prevent their stigmatization and manipulation in violent incidents and criminal activities it will be imperative to empower them with life skills**

and quality education, and to support their active contribution to a violence-free society.

D. Investing in the protection of the most vulnerable children

108. Violence is a frequent dimension of children's lives. It occurs in various forms and contexts and has serious and long-lasting consequences on their well-being and development. Prevention and elimination efforts need to address those dynamics and invest in the social inclusion of girls and boys at special risk, for whom the multiple dimensions of deprivation go hand in hand with a cumulative exposure to violence. Enhancing families' capacity to protect and care for their children and preventing child abandonment and placement in residential care remain crucial dimensions of that process.

E. Recognizing violence as a priority and cross-cutting concern in the development agenda

109. Violence does not take place in a vacuum. Important factors, such as poverty, environmental degradation and organized crime, addressed in section IV above, aggravate the risk of child neglect, maltreatment and abuse. Conversely, the protection of children from violence contributes to social progress and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. As the international community considers the global development agenda for beyond 2015, it is critical to address violence as a priority and a cross-cutting concern, recognizing the centrality of the human dignity of the child, securing the protection of the most disadvantaged and safeguarding children's right to freedom from violence.

110. The Special Representative looks forward to continuing to collaborate closely with Member States and all other stakeholders in the further strengthening of this crucial agenda to help build a world where violence has no place.